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From Ace to Joker

Ronald Reagan's solitary achievement in Peking during his trip last April was clearing the sale of U.S. nuclear power reactors to power-shy China in a deal touted to be worth as much as \$15 billion to U.S. suppliers over the next dozen years. Three months later, following discreet pro-Israeli lobbying, the deal is dead for this year. That leaves Reagan holding not an ace, as he thought, but a joker. It also leaves China angry and the world again made aware of Israel's unique influence over U.S. foreign policy.

The opposition was led by Sen. Alan Cranston, a pillar of the pro-Israeli bloc and for years an effective Senate voice in trying to stop world proliferation of nuclear weapons. Cranston told the Senate June 21 that the Chinese have been giving Pakistan concealed nuclear weapons help, citing as his source unidentified "intelligence" that he said he had not received in any classified briefings from the Reagan administration.

Nuclear proliferation was indeed a factor. And the president did in fact cut some corners and ignore some fine print in agreeing to the nuclear power plant sale. But the real thrust by Cranston was a line in his Senate speech, ignored at the time, that China-aided nuclear weapons progress in Pakistan had "far more profound implications than were presented by the Iraqi nuclear program" in 1981. That line sent chills through the Islamic world.

Israel claimed that Iraq was concealing construction of a nuclear weapon, dubbed the Islamic Bomb, under cover of a nuclear power reactor it had bought from France. Shortly before Israel's 1981 election, then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin sent his air force to Baghdad to destroy that Iraqi reactor.

Cranston's charge that Pakistan's nuclear program now poses a greater threat to U.S. world interests than Iraq's did may reflect genuine concern in Jerusalem. It does not, however, reflect high-level views in the Reagan

administration. One official told us: "The Israelis have been providing us with intelligence for at least the past year but they invariably overestimate the Pakistani program and its fissionable [weapons-grade] material."

Concern in Israel over the U.S.-China power reactor deal has been made known to members of Congress in several private briefings here. Although Israel's Ambassador Meir Rosenne told us he did not know of a single briefing by any embassy official, Capitol Hill insiders insist that both the embassy and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) have raised warnings about the U.S.-China reactor deal to members of Congress. One of the leaders briefed was Cranston, who is Senate Democratic whip. The briefing took place in mid-June, just before his speech warning the Senate about Chinese-Pakistani collaboration.

What guaranteed success of the discreet moves against the Reagan-negotiated pact with China is the presi-

dential election campaign. Courting the Jewish vote as hard as he can against Walter F. Mondale, Reagan was vulnerable from the start because of his bold promise to veto any bill to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But Cranston's attacks on Pakistan will give the president other problems, even if he decides to send the dormant U.S.-China reactor agreement to Congress after the election. The senator excoriates Pakistan, a U.S. ally, for trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and demands a halt in American aid to countries seeking nuclear arms. But he has ignored Israel's presumed possession of at least a dozen nuclear "devices" and, like China, its refusal to sign the nonproliferation treaty.

Reagan can try to deal with such prejudice after the election. But there is little he can do before Nov. 6 to explain how his achievement got rubbed out so fast he could not even submit it to Capitol Hill.

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